Shri Arun Jaitely, had taken it up, in his meeting, with the US Trade Representative in February, in Tokyo; and the result is that a number of officials of the US Government, I am told, are against such a legislation. Sir, you don't want me to disclose which officer in the US Government has given us what assurance and what kind of tips he has given us, how we should proceed, who are the key legislators with whom we should liaison, etc. We are doing that through NASSCOM very effectively and I have assured NASSCOM that, if they want, we will give them a fund of Rs. 5 crores, just from our Ministry, so that this educating work for US legislators can proceed better.

The second and more important thing is that the US Trade Representative has even written an official letter to us in this regard.

The third point is that we are contacting the companies that are benefiting by outsourcing their business to India. They will be the ones who will get across the legislators and say, "If you don't allow us to source our work from low-cost places you are making the American companies uncompetitive". So, we are working on it.

Slashing of rates by cellular companies

*407. SHRI BHAGATRAM MANHAR:
SHRI RAJU PARMAR:

Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether it is a fact that cellular companies in the country have slashed their rates for mobile users;

(b) if so, what are the rates/schemes at present being offered by these cell phone operators; and

(c) whether the rates of MTNI and BSNL are very high as compared to the cell phone operators, and if so, the comparative rates of cell phone operators *vis-a-vis* the landline operators namely MTNL/BSNL/VSNL?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) to (c) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.

Statement

(a) and (b) Sir, the Telecom Regulatory Authority of India (TRAI) is responsible for fixation of tariffs for telecom services including Cellular Mobile Telephone Service (CMTS) in the country. Tariff for CMTS is currently under forbearance which means that the cellular operators are at liberty to offer various tariff options. Tariffs for CMTS have shown a continuously downward trend in the recent past; this is mainly due to the increased competition in the Cellular Sector. Cellular operators have various tariff plans with varying rates of monthly rental and airtime charges, which they go on revising from time to time. Information provided by TRAI indicates that currently there are more than 600 different tariff plans available for the cellular subscribers across the country.

(c) No, Sir. The rates of MTNL and BSNL are comparable and quite competitive as compared to the other operators. However, in view of the large number of different tariff plans across the country, it is not possible to make a meaningful comparison between the tariffs charged for CMTS by the cellular operators and those charged by BSNL and MTNL for land line phones (under Basic Telephone Services). VSNL does not operate CMTS or Basic Telephone Service.

SHRI BHAGATRAM MANHAR: Sir, the private cell operators are charging from Rs. 3,000 to Rs. 7,5000, as advance deposit, from subscribers for providing STD and ISD facilities. This is unjustified as crores of rupees are collected by cell operators for providing this service. In most of the advanced countries this practice is not adhered to. I would like to know from the hon. Minister whether he would direct the TRAI to examine it and take positive actions in the interest of the consumers.

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: Sir, whether there will be large or small downpayments to be charged by the operator, it is to be determined completely by the market. In the TRAI's order on which there was a full discussion last time, in the first half of the Session, as you know, they have given forbearance, that is, whatever amount the persons want to charge, the operators want to charge and the consumers are willing to pay, the cellular operators have that freedom in this regard.

Now, I come to the issue of the consumers getting agitated on this matter. Sir, they will walk away from the competition and go to

some other provider - especially, I will be happy if they come to BSNL. But the more important point is that there is a procedure - laid down in the Act passed by the Parliament - which prescribes that if there is a group of consumers agitated about a particular method or aggrieved about a particular method, they can go to TDSAT for redressal. But if it is an individual consumer, he can go to the consumer bodies set up under the Consumer Protection Act, 1988.

SHRI BHAGATRAM MANHAR: Sir, my second supplementary is: Although the Government is committed to provide excellent service to consumers, recently, it has been noticed that due to corporate rivalry, consumers are facing interconnectivity problems. Therefore, my particular question to the hon. Minister is : would he instruct all the cell phone operators, MTNL and BSNL to resolve all the pending issues of interconnectivity so that consumers may not suffer?

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: Sir, that is absolutely right. But it is corporate rivalry which has brought the rates down from Rs. 16.80 per minute to Rs. 1.80 per minute. It is because of corporate rivalry.

I come to the question of interconnectivity. You are right that in January this year, there was a problem. But as far as I know, there is no problem at the moment. That episode when they were not connecting calls of each other's networks is a matter that is now before TDSAT. TRAI itself has sent notices to all these people to explain as to what happened at that time. But, if there is a specific complaint about interconnectivity, I would be delighted to look into it.

SHRI RAJU PARMAR: Sir, the private cell phone operators have reduced the tariff and call charges drastically during the last one year, although the cost of maintenance has remained unchanged. I would like to ask the hon. Minister the reasons for increasing the rental and call charges as well as for reducing the pulse rate by MTNL and BSNL during the last one year.

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: Sir, as you know, in the TRAI's order, it was prescribed that the rentals should be increased. As I explained last time, BSNL and MTNL have given alternate packages to TRAI.

Due to the TRAI regulations. I am not in a position to disclose those packages, but you will find that the concerns expressed in this House by Members, both on monthly rentals and on pulse rates, have been addressed in those packages. If TRAI approves those packages, you will be very much satisfied with the result. Of course, this also means that the surplus of BSNL will be drastically reduced, because they used to finance the roll out to village telephony all by charging more on long distance telephony and those rates have collapsed as Mr. Parmar himself mentioned. If they do not increase rentals, they will have less surplus to roll out telephone services to the villages and for other things and then you will complain about it.

In the next four years, BSNL requires Rs. 29,000 crores for rolling out obligations. In the Five Year Plan, they have been given a princely sum of Rs. 1 crore per year! That means for the four years, only Rs. 4 crores. So, we have to raise money from one place or the other.

SHRIMATI S.G. INDIRA: Sir, when the private cell operators come out with advertisements, they quote one rate and at the time of billing, they charge different rates. What steps is the TRAI going to take to ensure that the public is not taken for a ride by such companies?

SHRI ARUN SHOURIE: Sir, as I have explained in my answer, there are 600 different packages in the market that are available to the subscribers. There are 600 different types of rate arrangements. So, a consumer may be going in for one package, but he actually might be charged for another package. If there is any specific complaint which the service provider does not attend to, as I have explained to you, it is either the Consumer Court which will look into it or if there is a group of consumers that is aggrieved, it will be taken care of by the TDSAT.

डा॰ प्रभा ठाकुर: सभापति महोदय, माननीय मंत्री जी ने जानकारी दी कि इनकी 600 टैरिफ योजनाएं हैं और प्रतिस्पर्धा के कारण मोबाइल सेल्युलर सेवा की दरें लगातार कम हो रही हैं, इसकी जानकारी के लिए तो धन्यवाद लेकिन मैं आपके माध्यम से यह जानना चाहती हूं कि भारत सरकार क्या इस प्रतिस्पर्धा में इतनी कमज़ोर हो गई है कि वह इनकी प्रतिस्पर्धा में survive करके अपनी दरें कम नहीं कर पा रही है? मैं यह भी

जानना चाहती हूं कि एक मई से घरेलू फोन पर जो लगभग 35 प्रतिशत की वृद्धि हुई है, क्या वह प्रभावी होने जा रही है? कृपया यह भी बताएं कि कितने लोग इस देश में मोबाइल सेल्युलर सर्विसिज़ का इस्तेमाल कर रहे हैं और कितने प्रतिशत लोग हैं जो केवल घरेलू फोन पर निर्भर हैं?

श्री अरुण शौरी: पहली बात तो यह है कि आज एक करोड़ बीस लाख सब्सक्राइबर्स मोबाइल टेलीफोन यूज़ कर रहे हैं और चार करोड़ के करीब फिक्सड लाइन सर्विसेज अवेल कर रहे हैं। दूसरी बात जो माननीय सदस्या ने कही कि क्या गवर्नमेंट इतनी कमज़ोर हो गई है - एक्चुअली कंप्लेंट दूसरी है। सेल्युलर ऑपरेटर्स की कंप्लेंट यह है कि BSNL का नेटवर्क जो है, वह टोटल 96 परसेंट है कंट्री में और वे अपने कंपीटीशन को दबा रहे हैं। आप जानते होंगे कि पिछले 6-8 महीनों में जब से उन्होंने अपनी सेल्युलर सर्विस शुरु की है तो BSNL की जो ''सेल वन'' सर्विस है, उसके करीब 22 लाख सब्सक्राइबर्स बन गए हैं। इसी तरह MTNL के दिल्ली और मुम्बई में करीब 3 लाख सब्सक्राइबर्स बन गए हैं। ...(व्यवधान)...

*408. [The questioner (Shri Abhay Kant Prasad) was absent for answer *vide* page 63-64 *infra*.]

Telephone facilities to post offices in Rajasthan

*409. SHRI AIMADUDDIN AHMED KHAN (DURRU): Will the Minister of COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY be pleased to state:

(a) whether telephone connections have been provided to all the post offices in Rajasthan;

(b) if not, the reasons therefor;

(c) the post offices where telephone connections are yet to be provided; and

(d) by when the telephone connections are likely to be provided to these post offices?

THE MINISTER OF COMMUNICATIONS AND INFORMATION TECHNOLOGY (SHRI ARUN SHOURIE): (a) to (d) A Statement is laid on the Table of the House.